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ABSTRACT

This paper, citing the gap that exists between the knowledge of best instructional practices and the modeling of those practices by college teachers, suggests a four-step plan for improvement. The first step is for the education unit on each campus to define the set of basic principles that underlie "good teaching." Step two is for each faculty member in the education unit to become an excellent teacher, based on the principles they have defined. The third step is to make all the students in the education unit aware of the unit's definition of good teaching. The fourth is to extend the education unit's definition of good teaching and expertise in achieving it to the entire campus. Each step is discussed with brief examples of how to implement them, and a list of eight good teaching principles is provided. (JD)

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Modeling Good Teaching in Liberal Arts Colleges

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Modeling Good Teaching in Liberal Arts Colleges

"Example is not the main thing in influencing others; it is the only thing." Albert Schweitzer

It has been apparent to teacher educators for sometime that their students tend to teach as they were taught. In spite of what they are told in their education courses, they go into their teaching positions as replicas of their own fifth grade, high school or college teachers. If students could be taught by the "best instructional practices" throughout their college experience, there could be congruence between the content of their education courses and the practice of their most recent teachers.

The new NCATE standards focus on the importance of such modeling.

> There is evidence in curricular planning and in the delivery of instruction that the program seeks to reflect best practice in its own instruction.
>
> Education students are exposed to a systematically varied set of instructional practices through modeling of instruction by faculty in the professional education unit.
>
> The institution as a whole regards the unit as one where superior instructional practice can routinely be found.
>
> (New NCATE Standards)

Professional educators know a great deal about good teaching practices; it is their expertise. But knowing and doing are two different things, and unfortunately teacher educators do not have an enviable reputation as the best teachers on many liberal arts campuses.

Some of the reasons for this could be:

-the necessary relationship with state agencies which may be viewed as bureaucratic.

-the perceived lack of content or knowledge base (by individuals in the traditional disciplines.)

-the failure of education faculty to practice what they preach.

-the career preparation in addition to the liberal arts focus.

-the modeling attempts made by education faculty in the past which failed to consider the maturity level of college students.

It is easier to inform students about the latest research in teaching than it is to actually change the way college faculty members teach. The story is told of a college professor stopping the lecture to ask why one of the students wasn't taking notes. The student responded that his father had taken this class and she was using his notes!

Teachers have had quite enough criticism and the purpose of this paper is not to add to it. The purpose of this paper is to acknowledge the gap that exists between the knowledge of best instructional practices and the modeling of those practices by college teachers, and to suggest a four step plan for improvement.

The first step is for the education unit on each campus to define the set of basic principles which underlie "good teaching". The important point here is not sameness: the NCATE standard specifically calls for the faculty to model a "varied set of instructional practices". What is important is that teacher educators be able to select the components and criteria that will constitute "good teaching" within the unit.

Strong leadership will be required to establish this definition because faculty members have traditionally defined good teaching as what they do. However, all instructional practices are not equally effective and a strong definition must make this clear. A definition that is too narrow will lose the richness of varied approaches which help students achieve a large repertoire of instructional skills. A definition that is too inclusive will not use the state of the art knowledge regarding good teaching and will not provide the necessary challenge and inspiration for stimulating models.

It is important for the definition to be specific about instructional practices that are appropriate in the context in which they are used. The failure to do this has often caused efforts to model in education classes to end up teaching college students as though they were first grade children. Appropriateness and context should be a basic part of the definition in order to avoid this problem. An example of principles of good teaching which is compatible with current K-12 research and also appropriate for college teaching is included in the appendix of this paper.

The second step is for each faculty member in the education unit to become an excellent teacher based on the principles which they have defined. It is not easy to change teaching behaviors. According to Thomas Good, "Much research has suggested that teachers seldom use feedback information advantageously and indeed are often hostile toward those who attempt to influence and facilitate their classroom efforts." (Teacher-Student Relationships , p. 314) But Good also notes that teachers are often unaware of their behavior and that "allowing them to see the discrepancies between their intended and their actual behavior and generally helping them become more aware of what they and their students do by using structured observation to provide descriptive (as opposed to evaluative) information is a useful plan for unfreezing and changing teacher behavior." (p. 314)

Video taping classes is an excellent way to provide non-evaluative feedback to teachers. Education students video tape short teaching segments as a part of most college programs. However, few college instructors have ever had to sit through one of their own classes! The first time I video taped a session of my educational foundations course, the students were amazed that the development of teaching skills continued after graduation, certification and tenure! College faculty who video tape their classes for study are modeling a concept which could help the future teachers be more aware of their teaching behavior after they begin teaching. Self-evaluations of the video taped class could be done in terms of the unit's definition of good teaching.

Peer observations have the potential for support as well as feedback. Teaching college is a lonely profession; we pour our reason and passion into our task. Our students often know this, but our peers seldom do. During the time I was Dean of Undergraduate Studies at Whitworth College, I found that faculty members were often glad when a problem arose because, by the time the problem was solved, at least someone knew what they were trying to accomplish. One faculty member told me that, in his ten years at the college, I was the first non-student to observe his class. We have assumed that observations and evaluations of each other would not be tolerated because of fear and/or academic freedom. But, in my opinion, the loneliness and lack of recognition by peers and supervisors is much greater than the fear.

Peer observations within the education department also have the added advantage of helping each member of the unit understand and own the total program.

The use of student feedback would become valuable in the improvement of teaching if it were specifically related to the unit's principles of good teaching. Examples of how to do this are explained in the next step.

The third step is to make all of the students in the education unit aware of the unit's definition of good teaching. This should begin in the first class on the first day and be reviewed as often as necessary. The failure of education programs to do this prevents students from gaining a concise and usable definition of the role of a teacher and obscures their goal of becoming "good teachers". Warren Bryan Martin of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is an effective critic of college faculties who forsake their responsibility to determine what is most important : "Since faculty can't decide what students should learn, faculty leave it to students to decide what faculty should teach." Step one of this paper proposes that the unit should make the decision about what constitutes good teaching; step two, that the faculty become role models consistent with this definition; and step three, that we teach students this definition as a base for their beginning professional roles.

There is an added, although perhaps devious, benefit to keeping the students informed about the principles of good teaching which the unit has selected. Student imput is taken seriously on liberal arts campuses and, in most cases, it is not based on the factors which the education profession considers to be the most important. There is a very real difference between teacher popularity and teacher excellence, and students need assistance in order to make intelligent distinctions between the two. According to Brophy and Good, "it is more important for the teacher to be taken seriously and respected than to be loved or admired." As Richard Calisch, a teacher in Illinois, wrote in an NEA Journal article years ago, "If you also want love, get married."

The fourth step is to extend the education unit's definition of good teaching and expertise in achieving it to the entire campus. In a sense, this step goes beyond the NCATE standard which does not require the modeling of good instructional practice beyond the education unit. However, students are being taught by teachers in other departments approximately 75% of the time. So extending the modeling influence can be extremely effective- especially for the content areas of secondary teachers. This is also the arena in which the education department can make its reputation for teaching excellence known to the entire faculty, which is a requirement of the new NCATE standards.

Educating the students to expect good teaching and to evaluate it intelligently will be the most important step in this campus wide extension. The TESA program (Teacher Expectations/Student Achievement) has been successful in the K-12 schools. Perhaps it is time for SETA (Student Expectations/Teacher Achievement)! Students pay high tuition at liberal arts colleges and they do have power. In many cases their positive evaluations of faculty are required for promotion and tenure. If they know what good teaching is and expect it campus wide, they are likely to get it.

It is also important to carry the unit's definition into the administrative offices and committees where evaluation forms are devised and revised; where faculty are evaluated, promoted and receive tenure; and where criteria are established for honoring faculty members for excellence in teaching. This means that faculty members from the education unit need to seek membership and leadership roles on these committees.

It is important to let the campus community know about the good teaching in the education unit. The grapevine about mistakes and problems seems to be superior to the one about successes. The leader of the unit can be proactive in informing the entire campus about the excellent teaching occurring in the education department.

Presentations can be made to new faculty about the expectations for and definition of good teaching on the campus. Education faculty could prepare and present these seminars on a regular basis. Faculty development seminars for improving instruction are also opportunities for presentations that model good instructional practices.

Joint faculty appointments between education and other content fields are another way of gaining the respect of other departments. For example, in one college, the decision was made to employ a person to assist the campus faculty in the educational usage of computers. Through the efforts of the education department, the new faculty member is located in and teaches for the education department with a half time release to assist the faculty of the entire campus. This help in improving instruction is coming from the education unit and the excellence of his instruction is visible to everyone.

One model for improving teaching campus wide has been used at Whitworth College. Voluntary groups of three faculty from different disciplines were formed for the sole purpose of improving teaching. All of the collected information was confidential unless the faculty member requested that the information be used for evaluation purposes. (Many individuals did make this request, because this information was perceived to be superior to student evaluations and the evaluations of peers who had not observed their teaching.) Each person video taped one class and the group watched the video tapes together and discussed them. They also visited each other's classes and listened to the instructor's self-evaluation of those classes. They met on a regular basis for the entire semester and became a support group for the changes that individuals decided to make in their teaching behaviors.

It is also helpful for college faculty from liberal arts areas to meet with outstanding K-12 teachers. Serving together on short term task forces, and observing student teachers and meeting master teachers in the public school setting can also increase the awareness of good teaching models.

Conclusion

One of the traditional strengths of liberal arts colleges has been their commitment to and reputation for teaching excellence. This tradition has been well documented in Thomas Warren's paper. (AILACTE Occasional Paper # 2; 1986) This strength will only continue if college teachers model the best instructional practices - changing them as the profession continues to develop its knowledge base. (The suggested teaching principles given in the appendix of this paper are one example of the application of recent K-12 research to college teaching.) The students who are being taught by K-12 teachers who are use methods based on the most recent research aren't likely to be impressed by college teachers who do less. Liberal arts faculties do model caring about students exceptionally well, as Thomas Warren states. One important way to care for students is to teach them with all of the expertise that is presently available. College teachers must challenge themselves to do this.

The tradition is strong and the time is right. Teacher education has the nation's attention. The new NCATE standards can be used to give education units the motivation to provide leadership for college faculties to model excellent teaching. Then, if teachers teach like they have been taught, it will be congruent with the content of their education courses.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD TEACHING

GOOD TEACHERS

--**know and demonstrate that the teacher's main responsibility is teach** and "concentrate most of their actions, time and energy on curricular related activities." (Brophy, Evertson)

--**challenge students without threatening them.** They form personal relationships with students and then place "active demands" on them (Kleinfield); helping students "discover needs they never knew they had" (Combs); and helping them derive personal meaning from new information.

--**specify objectives so that students know what is expected.**

--**use a wide variety of methods and approaches,** both direct and indirect, which are appropriate for the context and the specific needs of students.

--**individualize instruction** based on the understanding that "any strategy that is designed for all students will insure failure for many." (Brophy, Good)

--**use evaluation for identifying and remediating difficulties** as well as for grading purposes.

--**enjoy teaching and project enthusiasm, confidence and a sense of purpose.**

--**make it their personal responsibility to see that students learn** regardless of how much time and effort this might involve. (Brophy, Evertson)